



**Autism**  
TASMANIA INC.

**19th Annual Report**  
**2010/11 Annual General Meeting**

# Autism is...

*Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects what an individual sees, hears and senses. This can result in difficulties of communication, social, interaction and behaviour.*

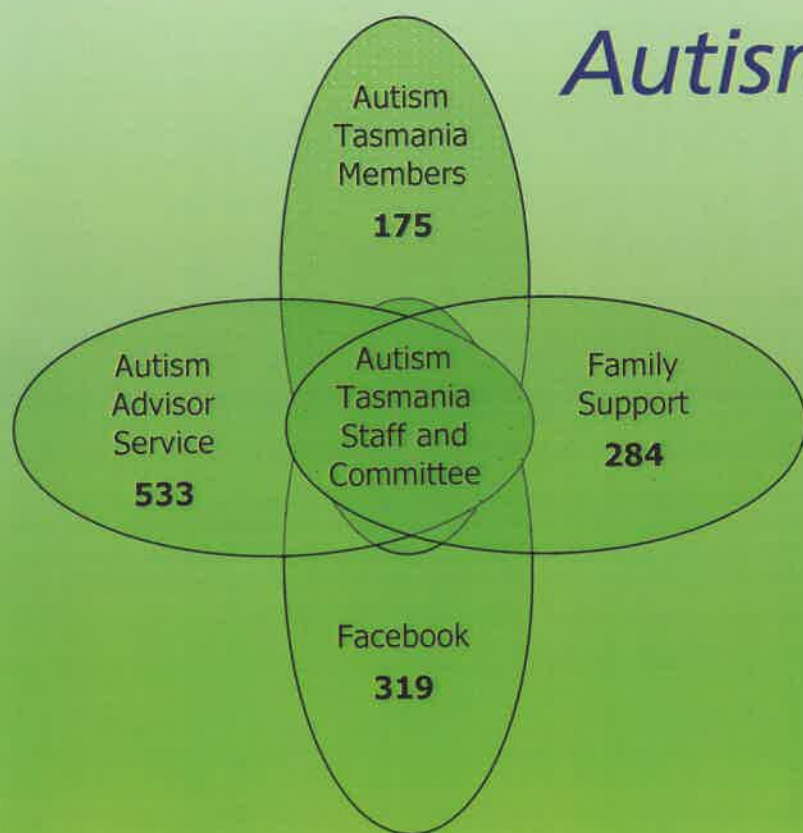
*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological disorder that occurs on a continuum, this means that symptoms can occur in many varieties and with varying degrees of intensity.*

*It is estimated that the prevalence of ASD in Australia is one child in every 160. Some estimate it at 1 in 100. It is no longer considered a low incidence condition. On these estimates every 20 minutes a person is diagnosed with ASD in Australia.*

*ASD can have an impact on the whole family. Everyday things that most of us take for granted have to be carefully planned and executed. This job is often made all the more complex by a lack of community understanding and assistance.*

## Autism Tasmania is...

*Autism Tasmania is more than the sum of its committee, or staff, and members. Autism Tasmania touches many people through our support services, and social media. Most importantly every one of the people whose lives intersect with Autism Tasmania have extended family and friends*



# Presidents Report

Mick Clark

To say that the last twelve months has been a period of rapid change is to devalue the experience – I'm sure to many of us it has often felt like a mighty rollercoaster or inside a giant washing machine. Right upfront I thank our extraordinary staff – those with us now and those who have moved on; my Committee colleagues – past and present; Association members – many who have stuck with Autism Tasmania through lean times; and the many supporters and friends we have in so many walks of life in all parts of the wider community. The achievements of Autism Tasmania in 2011 are the sum of all these parts, of the input from these many people and I thank each of you and all of you for your support, your grit, your vision and your sheer hard work to get us to this point.

Since July 2010, Autism Tasmania's course has been shaped by security of funding – a novel concept that still takes some getting used to. In addition to the three years of recurrent funding from FaHCSIA for the Autism Advisor services, we were finally able to secure our first service agreement and recurrent funding with DHHS. Our thanks to Minister Cassy O'Connor for her support and faith in our Association to help many more people on the autism spectrum, their families and carers.

In quick time, we put in place an almost new Committee, appointed our first CEO, moved offices in Hobart and set out to systematically build a suite of services to reach more people across a wider range of needs.

Underpinning our actions was the development of our Call to Action, launched at Parliament House in April by the Minister for Human Services, Cassy O'Connor and Shadow Minister for Human Services & Children, Jacqui Petrusma. The Call to Action identifies the imperatives for the autism community in Tasmania – those areas where we see a clear and present need to develop innovative public policies and service delivery models that can address the shortcomings and inconsistencies that people on the autism spectrum, their families and carers face every day.

We continue our call for improved educational services for school-aged children with an ASD; for development of an integrated, comprehensive system of support for families; for improved services for all adults; for an improved range of services for all children with an ASD; and for

ready and equitable access to early intervention for young children on the autism spectrum.

This call will continue to be shaped by our members and other people in the autism community as we meet and talk with them, gather and understand their experiences and progressively fine-tune the focus of our Call to Action.

One of the most positive signs has been the degree with which our State political representatives – across all parties and in both houses – have been interested in talking with Autism Tasmania and open to continuing this dialogue in a meaningful way. We're encouraged by this as one thing is certain - no-one has the single 'right' answer and its only by building effective relationships and working together on practical strategies that we will be able to better help the many people in the autism community.

It's worth noting just how many people Autism Tasmania now reaches – the figures on the opposite page demonstrate how many people's lives are touched by Autism Tasmania staff members and activities. This will only increase as we expand existing and develop new services.

In the closing months of this financial year we have been able to secure continuing funding under *Helping Children with Autism* for the Advisor Service and more recently as the sole provider of the very successful Early Days Workshops in Tasmania.

The recent months haven't been without difficulties – our inaugural CEO, Manuel Duharte departed suddenly for health and family reasons; our Autism Advisor pioneer, Sam Hooper, left at almost the same time but will have some continuing involvement with Autism Tasmania; and just last week, Arielle Chevalier moved on. Such sudden upheaval has placed a great deal of strain on remaining staff and the organisation as a whole.

We will be advertising shortly for a new full-time CEO - in the meantime it means broader roles for several staff and much more direct involvement for Executive Committee members. We will very shortly be back in full stride.





# Highlights of 2010 - 2011

## Call to Action

*Cassy O'Connor, Minister for Human Services and Community Development launching the Autism Tasmania Call to Action with a little help from Mick Clark and Manuel Duharte.*



*Elise Archer, Shadow Minister for Police & Emergency Management, Planning, Community Development and Aboriginal Affairs, and Autism Tasmania Senior Vice President Kristen Desmond reading the Autism Tasmania Call to Action.*

*New Offices: 1 Bowen Road Moonah*

*Manuel Duharte and Sam Hooper opening the new offices at 1 Bowen Road Moonah.*



## Brenda Smith Myles



*Some of the Autism Tasmania team with Brenda Smith Myles at her seminar in Launceston May 2011.*

*Front Row: Project Officer Sara Lindsay, former Autism Advisor Service Team Leader Sam Hooper, Brenda Smith Myles, Autism Advisor Service Admin Allison Lapham, Autism Advisor Kathy Fry. Back Row: Senior Vice President Kristen Desmond, Family Support Arielle Chevalier, Family Support Coordinator Rose Clark and former CEO Manuel Duharte.*

## Autism Awareness Month 2011

### Uni-Gym Spinathon

*Autism Tasmania joined forces with Uni-gym and a team of volunteers to raise money by braving the Uni-gym spin class for up to four hours. The impressive effort raised \$1600.*

### Art Exhibitions

*Rose Clark co-ordinated three art exhibitions in the North, South and North-west. They were a great opportunity for people with autism to show off their talents.*

### Autism Awareness inserts in Tasmanian School newsletters

*Autism Tasmania prepared and distributed a series of four weekly inserts for schools to include in their weekly newsletters. The project was a huge success bringing a greater depth of autism awareness to school communities.*



# Service Highlights

## Autism Advisor Service

It has been an incredibly rewarding opportunity for the Advisor Service to deliver the Helping Children With Autism (HCWA) package to Tasmanian families. The funding Package has provided these families with vital increased access to early intervention services. Most importantly, it provided families with a central base to receive information and referral services to suit their individual family needs and a central point of contact to help them through the early stages of their "autism journey".

The HCWA package was also the catalyst for huge growth within the organisation of Autism Tasmania. This has seen us grow in staff numbers and in the services we are able to provide to families as the peak body, in Tasmania for autism services.

The Advisor Team has found it important to build and maintain close links with all services available to families and children on the Autism Spectrum. In particular, panel providers, allied health professionals the education sector and other State and Territory stakeholders. The Advisor Service aims to provide the most up to date information about services available to families. This is an ongoing challenge given the constantly changing face of services that exist for families and carers.

In addition to positive feedback from clients about the HCWA package, we also received feedback on clients needs. Such as:-

- Improve access to panel providers, in particular in outer regional and remote areas by providing more incentives and simplifying the application process.
- More frequent Positive Partnership workshops. The feedback from families who attended these workshops stated that the information provided was extremely beneficial and would be something that they could undertake more frequently to address new issues that arise with their child's development.
- Additional support for families with finance management of their FaHCSIA funding as well as Medicare items and private expenses incurred to access early intervention services.
- Ongoing support and regular contact from an Advisor throughout the duration of the funding and beyond.

The Advisor Service celebrated the launch of our HCWA brochure which provides families and health care professionals with a uniquely presented method of accessing information in relation to this Government initiative. This brochure has received very positive feedback from all within the autism community.

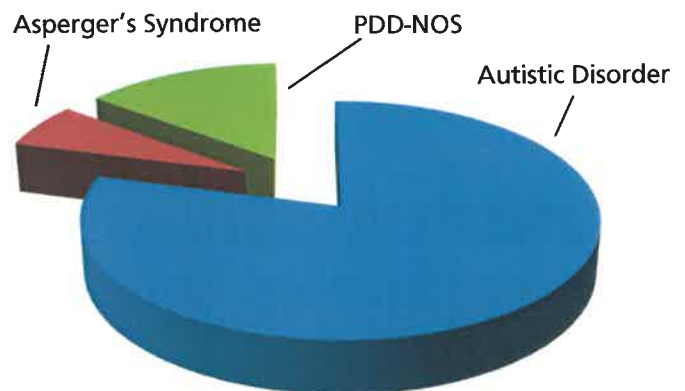


*A special thank you to the Hobart Women's Health Centre for their generous contribution towards the printing costs of this brochure.*

The Advisory Team would like to acknowledge and express our appreciation to the panel providers, who have registered with FaHCSIA, to deliver therapies within a professional and flexible environment, in a timely manner for many families.

## Clients

The number of eligible clients (0 – 6 years of age) the Advisory Service assisted in accessing funding from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 was 112.



**Total 112**

There were 89 children who were diagnosed with Autistic Disorder, 7 children were diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome while 16 children had a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS).

Clients from areas geographically outside the reach of metropolitan services and/or are geographically classified as regional or remote areas was 33. Indigenous clients living in metropolitan areas were 5 and Indigenous clients in non-metro areas in the period was also 5. In this period 2 Clients identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD metro).

The majority of referrals for all eligible clients came from State Services, St Giles and T ASDAS, with a secondary source of referrals from Medical Practitioners.



# Service Highlights

## Family Support Service

The confirmation of recurrent funding from the state government brought a reinvigoration of the Family Support Service and the Autism Advisor Service of Autism Tasmania.

Prior to securing recurrent State Government funding and the appointment of our first CEO, Autism Tasmania functioned from two small offices and the back of Rose Clark's car! We have now grown from small beginnings, in tiny office spaces with a meagre budget to having our own much larger, family friendly offices in Hobart, with a designated family meeting room and access to a well-appointed conference room.

The vision of Autism Tasmania as a one stop shop for information and support services for families and people took a giant leap forward this year.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) funding has allowed for the creation of a new family support position. This has allowed for a Family Support Co-ordinator to focus on the North and a Family Support Officer in the south. The Family support staff work closely with families and individuals on the spectrum in tandem with existing services to support their needs. A much more hands on approach than the Autism Advisor Service allows family support to achieve outcomes for families.

Working with groups and services as diverse as State diagnostic services, Workplace assistance support organisations, Respite services, Department of Education staff, teachers and teacher aides, key disability support agencies and child care centres, allows the family support service to assist families and individuals from assessment to ongoing support.

Some of the families assisted through the family support program have also been accessing the HCWA package but are in need of additional support to pave the way to make use of the funding. Some of the issues causing obstacles for families are around issues of housing, transport, confusion about Medicare items, communication difficulties with schools, service providers and relationship breakdowns. Families are supported with referrals to other agencies and organisations in order to eliminate the impediments to accessing intervention for their child.

## Resource Library

The Autism Tasmania library is an important component of Family Support. We are in the process of setting up a new library in collaboration with a library technician who attends the Adult Asperger's Syndrome support group. We have been ordering new books and DVDs (requested by AT members) and are keen to build up our resources. The Library collection reflects the diversity of experiences and the unique and wonderful people on the Autism Spectrum.

## Spectrum News

A significant aspect of the family support programme and the goals of Autism Tasmania is our members Magazine. After a hiatus Autism Tasmania rebranded it's newsletter as a magazine which made it's debut in National Autism Awareness Month April 2011. Spectrum News features articles of interest to the Autism Community, including profiles of individuals and service providers, news, programs, book and movie reviews and events.



## Support Groups

The family Support Service facilitates support groups state-wide. These groups allow individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and family members to get together and discuss topics of relevance and issues they are facing. The groups are a great way to share information and network.

## Early Days

As of July 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, Autism Tasmania was awarded a 3 year contract to facilitate Early Days Workshops around Tasmania. These workshops are a component of the HCWA Package, funded by FaHCSIA.

There are 4 modules available for delivery; Introductory, Development, Behaviour and Indigenous. Many of the modules have been translated into other languages. Workshops are open to parents and other carers, who have children, six years or under, diagnosed on the autism spectrum or are in the process of diagnosis assessment.



**Autism**  
TASMANIA INC.